NUMB. XXXI.

The SPECTATOR.

Sit mihi fas audita loqui! ———Vir.

Thurſday, April 5. 1711.

LAST Night, upon my going into a Coffee-Houſe not far from the *Hay-Market* Theatre, I diverted my ſelf for above half an Hour with overhearing the Diſcourſe of one, who, by the Shabbineſs of his Dreſs, the Extravagance of his Conceptions, and the Hurry of his Speech, I diſcovered to be of that Species who are generally diſtinguiſhed by the Title of Projectors. This Gentleman, for I found he was treated as ſuch by his Audience, was entertaining a whole Table of Liſtners with the Project of an Opera, which he told us had not coſt him above two or three Mornings in the Contrivance, and which he was ready to put in Execution, provided he might find his Account in it. He ſaid, that he had obſerved the great Trouble and Inconvenience which Ladies were at, in travelling up and down to the ſeveral Shows that are exhibited in different Quarters of the Town. The dancing Monkies are in one Place; the Puppet Show in another; the Opera in a third; not to mention the Lions, that are almoſt a whole Day's Journey from the Politer Part of the Town. By this means People of Figure are forced to loſe half the Winter after their coming to Town, before they have ſeen all the ſtrange Sights about it. In order to remedy this great Inconvenience, our Projector drew out of his Pocket the Scheme of an Opera, Entitled, *The Expedition of* Alexander *the Great*; in which he had diſpoſed of all the remarkable Shows about Town, among the Scenes and Decorations of his Piece. The Thought, he confeſt, was not originally his own, but that he had taken the Hint of it from ſeveral Performances which he had ſeen upon our Stage: In one of which there was was a Rary-Show; in another, a Ladder-dance; and in others a Poſture-Man, a moving Picture, with many Curioſities of the like nature.

This *Expedition of Alexander* opens with his conſulting the Oracle at *Delphos*, in which the dumb Conjurer, who has been viſited by ſo many Perſons of Quality of late Years, is to be introduced as telling him his Fortune: At the ſame time *Clench* of *Barnet* is repreſented in another Corner of the Temple, as ringing the Bells of *Delphos*, for joy of his Arrival. The Tent of *Darius* is to be Peopled by the Ingenious Mrs. *Salmon*, where *Alexander* is to fall in Love with a Piece of Wax-Work, that repreſents the beautiful *Statira*. When *Alexander* comes into that Country, in which *Quintus Curtius* tells us the Dogs were ſo exceeding fierce that they would not looſe their Hold, tho' they were cut to pieces Limb by Limb, and that they would hang upon their Prey by their Teeth when they had nothing but a Mouth left, there is to be a Scene of *Hockley in the Hole*, in which is to be repreſented all the Diverſions of that Place, the Bull-baiting only excepted, which cannot poſſibly be exhibited in the Theatre, by Reaſon of the Lowneſs of the Roof. The ſeveral Woods in *Aſia*, which *Alexander* muſt be ſuppoſed to paſs through, will give the Audience a Sight of Monkies dancing upon Ropes, with the many other Pleaſantries of that ludicrous Species. At the ſame time, if there chance to be any Strange Animals in Town, whether Birds or Beaſts, they may be either let looſe among the Woods, or driven acroſs the Stage by ſome of the Country People of *Aſia*. In the laſt great Battel, *Pinkethman* is to perſonate King *Porus* upon an Elephant, and is to be encounter'd by *Powel*, repreſenting *Alexander* the Great upon a Dromedary, which nevertheleſs Mr. *Powel* is deſired to call by the Name of *Bucephalus*. Upon the Cloſe of this great deciſive Battel, when the two Kings are thoroughly reconciled, to ſhew the mutual Friendſhip and good Correſpondence that reigns between them, they both of them go together to a Puppet Show, in which the ingenious Mr. *Powel*, *Junior*, may have an Opportunity of diſplaying his whole Art of Machinery, for the Diverſion of the two Monarchs. Some at the Table urged that a Puppet Show was not a ſuitable Entertainment for *Alexander* the Great; and that it might be

be introduced more properly, if we suppose the Conqueror touched upon that Part of *India* which is said to be inhabited by the Pigmies. But this Objection was looked upon as frivolous, and the Proposal immediately over-ruled. Our Projector further added, that after the Reconciliation of these two Kings they might invite one another to Dinner, and either of them entertain his Guest with the *German* Artist, Mr. *Pinkethman*'s Heathen Gods, or any of the like Diversions, which shall then chance to be in vogue.

This Project was receiv'd with very great Applause by the whole Table. Upon which the Undertaker told us, that he had not yet communicated to us above half his Design; for that *Alexander* being a *Greek*, it was his Intention that the whole Opera should be acted in that Language, which was a Tongue he was sure would wonderfully please the Ladies, especially when it was a little raised and rounded by the *Ionick* Dialect; and could not but be wonderfully acceptable to the whole Audience, because there are fewer of them who understand *Greek* than *Italian*. The only Difficulty that remained, was, how to get Performers, unless we could persuade some Gentlemen of the Universities to learn to Sing, in order to qualify themselves for the Stage; but this Objection soon vanished, when the Projector informed us that the *Greeks* were at present the only Musicians in the *Turkish* Empire, and that it would be very easy for our Factory at *Smyrna* to furnish us every Year with a Colony of Musicians, by the Opportunity of the *Turky* Fleet; besides, says he, if we want any single Voice for any lower part in the Opera, *Lawrence* can learn to speak *Greek*, as well as he does *Italian*, in a Fortnight's time.

The Projector having thus settled Matters, to the good liking of all that heard him, he left his Seat at the Table, and planted himself before the Fire, where I had unluckily taken my Stand for the Convenience of over-hearing what he said. Whether he had observed me to be more attentive than ordinary, I cannot tell, but he had not stood by me above a quarter of a Minute, but he turned short upon me on a sudden, and catching me by a Button of my Coat, attack'd me very abruptly after the following manner. Besides, Sir, I have heard of a very extraordinary Genius for Musick that lives in *Switzerland*, who has so strong a Spring in his Fingers, that he can make the Board of an Organ sound like a Drum, and if I could but procure a Subscription of about Ten Thousand Pound every Winter, I would undertake to fetch him over, and oblige him by Articles to set every thing that should be sung upon the *English* Stage. After this he looked full in my Face, expecting I wou'd make an Answer, when, by good Luck, a Gentleman that had entered the Coffee-House since the Projector applied himself to me, hearing him talk of his *Swiss* Compositions, cry'd out with a kind of Laugh, Is our Musick then to receive further Improvements from *Switzerland*? This alarm'd the Projector, who immediately let go my Button, and turned about to answer him. I took the Opportunity of the Diversion, which seemed to be made in favour of me, and laying down my Penny upon the Bar, retired with some Precipitation.

Compleat Setts of this Paper, for the Month of March, are to be sold by Mr. Graves in St. James's Street; Mr. Lillie, Perfumer, the Corner of Beaufort-Buildings; Mr. Sanger at the Temple Gate, Mr. Knapton in St. Paul's Church-Yard, Mr. Round in Exchange Ally, and Mrs. Baldwin in Warwick-Lane.

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